

THE ORNITHOLOGICAL
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MIDDLE EAST



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EDITORS: D J Fisher and C A Harbard.

All records in this Bulletin are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee of the country concerned.

Please note that details of expeditions, availability of expedition reports, news of members, other Societies and ornithological events are welcomed and may be printed in the Bulletin free of charge as "Announcements", subjects to the discretion of the Bulletin Editor.

Cover: Arabian Warbler Sylvia leucomelaena by Mike Hodgson, from a photograph by John Marchant.

EDITORIAL

For some time now we have been considering ways in which we could improve our twice yearly Bulletin and with this issue have taken the opportunity to do so. We hope you like the new design which we feel will be both easier to read and to store (alongside your copies of Sandgrouse). However, the most important part of the Bulletin is, of course, the text within it and so we appeal to you all once again to send us any contributions which you would like to see in print. OSME must surely have more active members than most other ornithological societies so do let us know about the projects you are involved in and what you have found out or seen.

Within this Bulletin we are announcing the plans for our first OSME expeditions, which we hope will visit North Yemen in the autumn of 1985. Readers of Sandgrouse will already be aware of the country's ornithological riches and we hope that an OSME team working in the country over a ten week period will be able to contribute towards furthering our knowledge of its avifauna and to encourage its conservation.

Unfortunately due to continually rising costs, the Council has regretfully decided that subscription rates to OSME will have to be increased in 1985. The present rates have been maintained for four years in an unfavourable economic climate, and it is hoped that the new rates will enable the Society to continue to flourish for some time to come. Good news is that for the first time we are introducing FAMILY and LIFE MEMBERSHIP rates which we hope will prove attractive to a number of members.

A PROPOSED OSME EXPEDITION TO NORTH YEMEN IN AUTUMN 1985

OSME are planning their first expedition. The aim is a broad-based ornithological study of North Yemen - especially the Tihamah - in relation to man's activities (agricultural development, human settlement and oil exploration) and an assessment of the consequences of these activities for bird conservation. Membership of the expedition is open to all OSME members and the organisers are Dr Michael Rands and Richard Porter.

Arrangements (including obtaining the necessary permissions) for such an expedition to a little known area may prove difficult. Therefore we are announcing these plans somewhat prematurely in the hope that there won't be any problems. However, potential members should remember that we may have to cancel the expedition and if this becomes necessary successful applicants will be informed by 1 April 1985 at the latest.

Objectives

There will be three specific objectives:

1. To carry out a detailed ornithological survey of the Tihamah (coastal plain) where much agricultural development has taken place and oil exploration is about to begin.
2. To study the birds endemic to the Arabian Plateau in relation to man's activities (which may favour these species).
3. To establish the importance of North Yemen as a migration route for raptors and other soaring birds.

The Cost

Each expedition member must be self financing. We estimate the cost will be about £700 per person for five weeks. No OSME funds will be available but the expedition will apply for financial support from other bodies.

Duration

The expedition will run from the beginning of October until mid-December 1985. Most members will be expected to join the expedition for at least four weeks, the full ten week period being preferable.

Selection of Personnel

The expedition is open to all OSME members but we are unlikely to have more than 10 people in North Yemen at any one time. Numbers will, therefore, be strictly limited, and competition for places fierce. Preference will be given to those applicants with considerable ornithological experience (both at home and abroad) who have the expertise we require. Field work will be strenuous involving long periods of census work in hot weather, and living conditions will be very basic. Mike Rands and Richard Porter will make the final selection.

Publications

The results of this expedition will be submitted for publication to Sandgrouse; no expedition member will be able to publish data elsewhere without prior permission.

The Future

This expedition (if successful) will be the first of a series of OSME expeditions to promote ornithological research and nature conservation in the Middle East. Please bear this in mind when applying!

How to Apply

Applicants should send a copy of their curriculum vitae together with any other relevant information (eg length of time available, medical or mechanical experience abroad) to Dr M R W Rands, The Game Conservancy, Fordingbridge, Hampshire, SP6 1EF. Please do not apply unless you are available next autumn. We will select expedition members at the end of December.

ADDITIONS TO THE NORTH YEMEN 'LIST' - Richard Porter

Following the publication in Sandgrouse 4 (1982) of two papers: "Spring observations of the Birds of North Yemen" (L Cornwallis and R F Porter) and "Observations on the Birds of North Yemen in 1979 (N R Phillips) visiting ornithologists and resident expatriots have updated our knowledge of the rich and varied bird life of this dramatic country. In view of the proposed OSME Expedition it seems timely to bring the North Yemen list up to date - at least provisionally for not all records have been systematically collected yet.

Known visits since 1982 have been made by Michael Evans, A Helbig, Nigel Redman and myself while field observations by 'residents' has been largely the work of John Finch, John Hickerton, Jan Karpowicz and Rodney Self. Most species in the list below have been added since spring 1982 but the larks refer to old records which have recently been discovered by literature and skin

searches at the British Museum and a few observations are the result of a multidisciplinary expedition to the Tihamah in winter 81/82 during which Keith Brockie made some interesting discoveries.

The species which follow are those not recorded in Cornwallis & Porter or Phillips. A brief indication of status is given against each. While some had apparently not been recorded until 1982 it is clear they should not be considered as vagrants. This I believe is due to two factors: an increase in observers and the recent creation of sewage lagoons near to Taizz and Hodeidah which provide permanent 'fresh water': a habitat that is very much at a premium in Southern Arabia.

LITTLE GREBE Tachybaptus ruficollis small numbers, summer, autumn, winter, three sites (breeding proved).

BLACK-NECKED GREBE Podiceps nigricollis four, Jan-Feb, two coastal sites.

CORMORANT sp Phalacrocorax sp one, January, coast.

SACRED IBIS Threskiornis aethiopicus two-four, most months in two coastal areas.

SHELDUCK Tadorna tadorna three, winter, coast.

GADWALL Anas strepera v. small numbers, winter, three sites.

POCHARD Aythya ferina three, January, near Hodeidah.

FERRUGINOUS DUCK Aythya nyroca v. small numbers, January & December, two sites.

TUFTED DUCK Aythya fuligula small numbers, January & December, two sites.

MERLIN Falco columbarius one, January, Hodeidah.

LITTLE BUTTON QUAIL Turnix sylvatica one, January, Tihamah.

LITTLE CRAKE Porzana parva three, October, Taizz.

BAILLON'S CRAKE Porzana pusilla one, October, Taizz.

KNOT Calidris canutus 19, January, coast.

SHARP-TAILED SANDPIPER Calidris acuminata one, December, near Taizz.

SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW Numenius tenuirostris one, January, Hodeidah.

BLACK TERN Chlidonias nigra three, December, near Taizz.

COMMON NODDY Anous stolidus two, summer, two coastal areas.

ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET Psittacula krameri small numbers, apparently throughout year. Sana'a. Probably escapes from captivity.

ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET Psittacula eupatria up to five, winter, Sana'a. Most certainly escapes from captivity.

DIDRIC CUCKOO Chrysococcyx caprius rare, May-June, highlands. (breeds?).

KLAAS'S CUCKOO Chrysococcyx klaas rare, May-June, highlands. (breeds?).

BARN OWL Tyto alba rare, throughout year, Hodeidah area (breeds?).

DUNN'S LARK Eremalauda dunni one, near Mushainiqa.

BAR-TAILED DESERT LARK Ammomanes cinturus one, near Mushainiqa.

CITRINE WAGTAIL Motacilla citreola one, December, Ibb.

REED WARBLER Acrocephalus palustris two, October, Taizz.

CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER Acrocephalus stentoreus one, January, near Hodeidah.

GREAT REED WARBLER Acrocephalus arundinaceus two, August and eight, January, coastal areas.

SUBALPINE WARBLER Sylvia cantillans one, January, Tihama.

STARLING Sturnus vulgaris one, January, Zabid.

Records are now being collected and collated by Michael Evans, Effie Warr and myself and any observations not previously published or 'submitted' would be greatly welcomed so that an up-to-date 'working' list of the Birds of North Yemen can be produced; indeed we would like to do this by next spring.

Finally it should be mentioned that no 'official' process for record assessment exists for North Yemen as in the case in most

Middle East countries. Thus the inclusion of records above should not be taken as their acceptance, though in most cases photographs or detailed notes have been taken by competent observers. We could however request that any new or unusual observations that are submitted have supporting details - including a description - so as to ease the task of judging them, ideally by a Records Committee for which there is now clearly a need.

IMPALED DATES: BY SHRIKES OR BY CHANCE? P J Cowan

Dates, the fruits, of the date-palm Phoenix dactylifera have been found impaled on palm frond spikes and lodged in its trunk crevices (E D H Johnson, in G Beven and M D England, 1969, Brit Birds, 62: 192-199; K E L Simmons, 1969, Brit Birds, 62: 203-204; C Erard, 1970, Bull Brit Orn Cl 90: 107-111; J Parrott, 1980, Ibis 122: 532-533). These authors attributed this to the Great Grey Shrike Lanius excubitor on the basis of circumstantial evidence. Shrikes have not been observed actually impaling dates.

On the basis of my casual observations of impaled and lodged dates in the Libyan Sahara I prefer the following hypothesis which involves chance not shrikes. Wind action causes the date clusters to blow around the palm crown. Some dates impale directly, others fall and either impale, lodge in trunk crevices or reach the ground. Date harvesting will also cause some dates to fall.

Most of the spiked dates seen by Johnson were on horizontal spikes in the palm crown. This could be due to horizontal movement of the date clusters during wind action or frond growth post spiking. Both Johnson and Parrott mentioned spiked dates which appeared partially consumed. I have seen a Spanish Sparrow Passer hispaniolensis apparently eating a spiked date.

Actual observations of the act of impaling, whether by shrikes or chance, are obviously needed to solve this problem. However, further circumstantial evidence especially if of a systematic and detailed nature would be of great relevance.

Dr P J Cowan, 68 Drumduan Park, Forres, Morayshire, Scotland.

RECENT TRIPS TO EASTERN TURKEY

1983

Between 18th May and 21st July 1983 Rodney Martins, Chris Murphy and Craig Robson travelled extensively in Turkey and Northern Cyprus.

Included in the 299 species which they recorded were a number of birds rarely reported and two species new for Turkey.

Breeding was proved for a number of less common species, perhaps most exciting of these being Great Bustard Otis tarda in an area east of Diyarbakir which may prove to be an important new site. Great Bustard were also seen in the Murat Valley between Patnos and Malazgirt. This long and meandering river valley held interesting birds at all stops between Agri and Bulanik. Common Cranes Grus grus and Montagu's Harriers Circus pygargus were plentiful and two pairs of Demoiselle Cranes Anthropoides virgo appeared to be holding territories. Also in this area we saw two Sakers Falco cherrug and two Citrine Wagtails Motacilla citreola.

In the north east corner of Van Golu where the Bendi Mahi Cay flows in to form an interesting marsh, a male Citrine Wagtail showing the characteristics of the race *Werae* was observed whilst a female was seen collecting food and taking it several hundred

metres across the marsh before landing out of sight. Another male Citrine Wagtail was seen to the north of this site close to the Iranian border. Perhaps most important among an interesting variety of birds at Bendi Mahi was a flock of 500 White Pelicans Pelecanus onocrotalus. To the south of the city of Van, Grey-necked Buntings Emberiza buchanani were found commonly on the dry stony hillsides. Another Saker was seen here. Offshore, two Black-throated Divers Gavia arctica in non-breeding plumage were observed whilst in the reed beds close to Van Castle there was a female White-headed Duck Oxyura leucocephala with three small ducklings.

As well as finding Red-wattled Lapwings Vanellus indicus by the River Tigris, at Cizre (see below), we also found nine Black Francolins Francolinus francolinus, including a male displaying to a female, a colony of Dead Sea Sparrows Passer moabiticus and 40 pairs of Collared Pratincoles Glareola pratincola.

At Birecik notable species were: a pair of Desert Larks Ammomanes deserti (see below); a small colony of Little Swifts Apus affinis; several small colonies of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters Merops superciliosus; 40 Yellow-throated Sparrows Petronia xanthocollis; Long-eared Owls Asio otus with 2 fledged young; a pair of Striated Scops Owls Otus brucei; and an Eagle Owl Bubo bubo. Sadly, Bald Ibises Geronticus eremita were not nesting in the town; at the captive-breeding enclosure we counted at least 30 birds including 17 fledged young. At least two of the adults had malformed bills.

To the north west of Gaziantep Upcher's Warblers Hippolais languida, White-throated Robins Irania gutturalis, both Rock and Great Rock Nuthatches Sitta neumayer and Sitta tephronota and Cinereous Buntings Emberiza cineracea were all plentiful.

A flock of 1,200 Rose-coloured Starlings Sturnus roseus at Midyat was impressive and a total of 22 Pale Rock Sparrows Petronia brachydactyla between Idil and Cizre was something of a relief after much fruitless searching further west. Attempts to find Red-tailed Wheatear Oenanthe xanthopyrma in this region were thwarted by military operations.

In the Goksu delta interesting birds included 4 or 5 Purple Gallinules Porphyrio porphyrio, up to a dozen Audouin's Gulls Larus audouinii coming into roost at Tasuai and two Eleanor's Falcons Falco eleanorae. Bitterns Botaurus stellaris were heard booming at Hotamis where there was also a Red-footed Falcon Falco vespertinus, five Dalmation Pelicans Pelecanus crispus and ten Greater Sand Plovers Charadrius leschenaultii, but no White-tailed Plovers Vanellus leucurus. This was one of the few sites where we recorded Marbled Teal Marmaronetta angustirostris.

One pair of White-backed Woodpeckers Deudrocopus leucotos was found in beech forest in Thrace and another pair in pine forest to true north of Akseki, Southern Coastlands.

In the north east Green Warblers Phylloscopus nitidus were abundant at several localities, notably around Ikisdere and in the Zigana Pass. At Sumela Monastery, on the 4th July, a female Red-breasted Flycatcher Ficedula parva proved extremely shy and may have been breeding. Of greater excitement, however, was the finding of three male Caucasian Blackcocks Tetrao mlokosiewiczi and five Caspian Snowcocks Tetraogallus caspius in the mountains between Ispir and Rize at 3,000m. Villagers also told us of numbers of Blackcock occurring in the mountains to the north of Baybint, further to the west.

C R and R M made a brief visit to Cyprus in early June and found the two specialities Cyprus Warbler Sylvia melanothorax and

Cyprus Pied Wheatear Oenanthe cypriaca common and easy to find.

Both the Desert Larks and the Red-wattled Lapwings were new birds for Turkey and so our sightings of these birds are described below.

Desert Lark Ammomanes deserti

A pair, considered to be holding territory, were found by C M on a stony plateau 5kms north of Birecik on 8th June 1983; they were also seen by R M and C R on 9th June. The larks were small to medium-sized, very plain sandy brown with a greyish tone and a brighter, more rufous-sandy crown. Underparts were uniform greyish-white. Bill yellowish. The male, singing from the ground and in short song flights showed quite rufous wings and dark brown corners to an otherwise rufous tail. The species breeds from Morocco, south to the southern edge of the Sahara, and east to N W India. This would appear to be a northerly extension of the species range, presumably of the race A.d.isabellinus, occurring in Syria.

Red-wattled Lapwing Vanellus indicus

On 15th June 1983 C R and R M heard and saw two of these very distinctive birds on the outskirts of Cizre, south-eastern Turkey. The following morning C M located 5 birds in the same area and a little further to the south on the stony banks of the River Tigris and adjacent pools. By their excited manner C M considered at least two pairs were holding territory but in the short time available, owing to the strict security of this border area, no evidence of nesting could be found. Three races are recognised, the nearest one to Turkey being V.i.saigneri which breeds from the Middle East to Pakistan. This record constituted a recent extension of range northwards, probably from central and

eastern Iraq, unless it has been previously overlooked.

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1984

As a postscript to Chris Murphy's article it may interest members to hear about Simon Harrap's trip to eastern Turkey during the summer of 1984. Simon visited many of the sites mentioned by Chris and the highlights of his trip included the following birds: an Eleonora's Falcon at Birecik, well away from the coast; four male Caucasian Blackcocks between Ispir and Rize; five Red-wattled Lapwings at Cizre; a pair of Desert Larks feeding three young at Birecik and another male nearby; about 100 Pale Rock Sparrows around Gazientep and Birecik; two or three male Citrine Wagtails at Bendi Mahi as well as a female which behaved as if breeding and another five males and two females in a small marsh near Ardahan of which two males were seen carrying food on both of the days which Simon was there.

AUTUMN RAPTOR MIGRATION THROUGH ISRAEL

The following extract is taken from the latest edition of The Torgos (Vol 4 No 1 (8) June 1984) in which there appears a report by Ehud Dovrat in Hebrew, with English summary, on the raptor migration at Kfar Kasem in the autumn of 1983.

Kfar Kasem lies to the north of Tel Aviv and from 28th August to 16th October 1983 12 observation posts were set up along a 20km stretch to record the southerly migration.

"316,459 raptors were counted with Lesser Spotted Eagles Aquila pomarina being the most numerous, 141,866 being counted. This is five times the estimated world population. It seems that the whole world population migrates over Israel. During two days 29 - 30 September 46,579 and 29,967 Lesser Spotted Eagles passed over the area respectively. A completely albino Lesser Spotted Eagle was seen this year for the first time.

Only 133,621 juvenile Honey Buzzards Pernis apivorus were counted. About one third of those seen in 1982. They probably passed further east or at too high an altitude to be counted.

A record number of Levant Sparrowhawks Accipiter brevipes was seen - 25,316."

These figures are truly staggering and many observers will doubtless want to witness the spectacle for themselves. Because the English summary does not give details of counting techniques it must be assumed that any possibilities of duplication have been taken into account over the 12 observation posts. This must though have presented the co-ordinators with problems for raptors can easily be counted and often identified (at least to type) for distances of 3 - 4 km or more from any one spot.

Richard Porter

A NEW SPECIES FOR EGYPT

We recently received a copy of a report on a trip to Egypt from 15th to 29th April 1984 from Manfred Siering. Amongst the many interesting sightings which the group made was one of an adult male Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting Emberiza tahapisi which was seen near the St Catherine's Monastery in the Siha: with a group of Trumpeter Finches Bucanetes githagineus, Sinai Rosefinches

Carpodacus sinuatus and Desert Larks Ammomanes deserti. The birds were all coming to drink at a pool of water and one photograph of the bunting was taken. This species has not been recorded previously in Egypt (nor for that matter in the Western Palearctic).

NATIVE LANGUAGE POPULAR BIRDBOOK

We were pleased to hear that ICBP's Migratory Committee has recently prepared a basic "dummy" manuscript of a popular book (suitable for children) complete with colour plates and line illustrations, which can be translated and published in the Mediterranean region. Several nations (Greece, Libya, Lebanon, Turkey and Tunisia have worked on versions appropriate to their country, and the first publications are expected in late 1984.

BIRDS IN EILAT - APRIL 1984

We have recently received a 41 page trip report of a visit made to Eilat, Israel from 8th - 22nd April by Mike Pinder, Nick Carter and Mike Denton. This provides a very useful account for those intending to visit this bird watching 'hot-spot' in April and a copy of the report can be obtained from Mike Pinder, 29 Thick Hollins, Meltham, Huddersfield, HD7 3DQ, England. Price £2.50 including postage.

REVIEW

The Birds of South West Saudi Arabia: Arthur Stagg (1984)

Because of its vastness, uninviting terrain and harshness of climate many parts of the Arabian Peninsula are still shrouded in a veil of ornithological ignorance. Arthur Stagg has now drawn aside the curtain on one corner. South West Arabia (about 100,000 square kilometres) is a unique area for birds, probably the

richest part of the whole peninsula as far as resident and breeding species are concerned. There are coastal mangrove thickets and montane juniper forests and a whole range of habitats in between. A healthy selection of endemics are found including several relict mountain species with counterparts far to the north in temperate palearctic regions. Whilst on the hot coastal 'Tihama' plain many afrotropical species reach the north easternmost extreme of their range. Arthur was resident in Khamis Mushait in the mountainous Asir Province for three years (1981-3) and travelled widely in the region. This privately printed booklet is the summary report of the more than 250 species he observed. He gives details of his assessment of population, range and status of each species and includes several revisions of the previously known status. For example some birds previously thought to be resident are now known to be summer visitors and vice versa. His observations have greatly extended the range of other species and he has added one new resident species to the birds of the Kingdom in the White-collared Kingfisher Halcyon chloris, discovered in a Red Sea mangrove thicket during April 1982. Introductory notes and three sketch maps concern the geography, geology and climate. These notes and the species accounts make a comprehensive report on the avifauna of the region, which will be invaluable to anyone birding there for many years to come. A small criticism is that one would like to see more reference made to previous works and more exact details of the numbers of birds seen and dates of occurrence. But this extra information, especially the latter, would probably enlarge the work beyond the scope of a private work as well as being too bulky to publish through a journal. 58 pages (A5 size). Available from the author A J Stagg, P O Box 1732, Riyadh 11441, Saudi Arabia. Price £3.00 (includes surface postage).

Michael Jennings.

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Compiled by C A Harbard

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RED SEA OIL POLLUTION AND BIRDS

In OSME Bulletin 11, page 8, we published an interim report of an expedition to the Red Sea province of Egypt. This has now been printed as a 72 page report, "Oil pollution of the Egyptian Red Sea and Gulf of Suez and its effect on birds" by P C Heathcote, D Parr, M C Jennings and R Frost. A few copies of the report are available, price £7.00 (including postage) from P C Heathcote, 5 Cedar Close, Meopham, Kent DA13 0ED.

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Stanley Cramp	For being awarded the Union Medal of the British Ornithologists Union for his outstanding contribution to ornithology and conservation.
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Sir Derek Barber	For his recent Knighthood for, amongst other things, his services to conservation.
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Michael Gallagher	For his receiving the Stamford Raffles Award of the Zoological Society of London for his contribution as an amateur to zoology and in particular to Arabian Ornithology.
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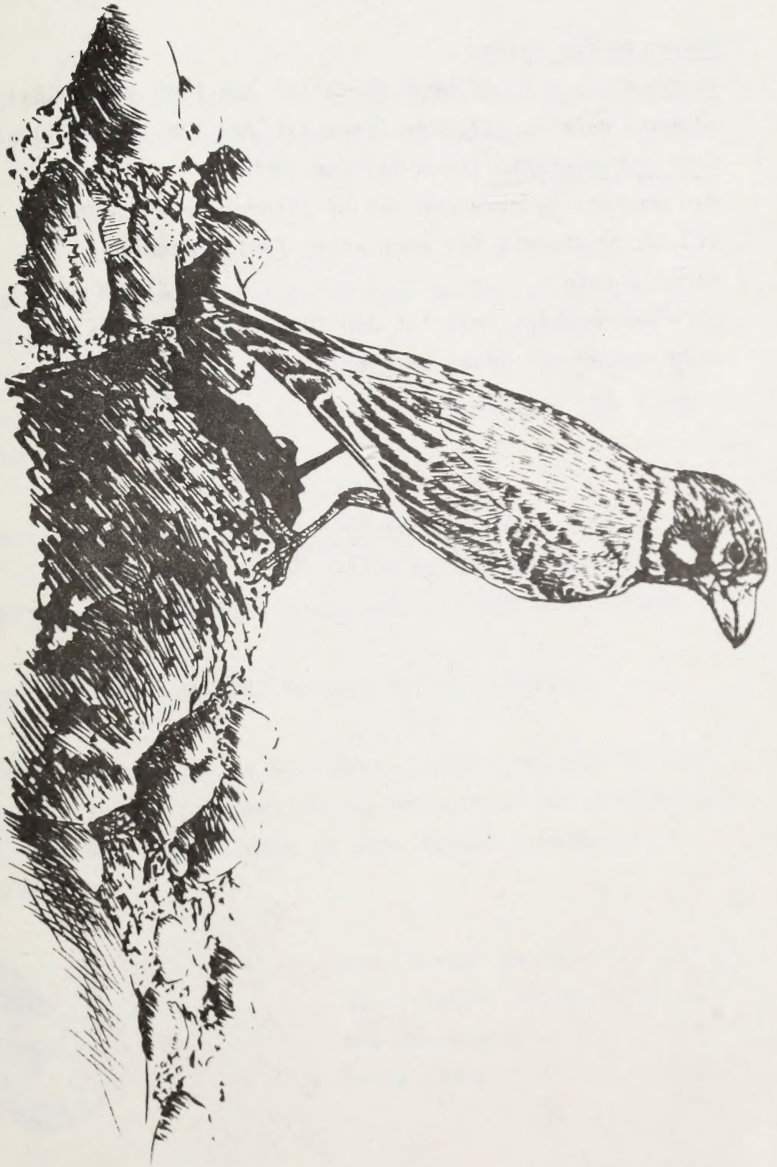
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Remember that £500 has been set aside for grants in 1985. Applications, which must be from fully paid up OSME Members, should reach the Conservation Research Committee, OSME, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, by 15th November 1984. Guidelines and conditions concerning these awards were set out in Bulletin 10. New members should contact Nigel Redman for further information.

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